

Commerce Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Kathleen B. Cooper
Before the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census
Tuesday, April 19, 2005

“Halfway to the 2010 Census:
The Countdown and Components to a Successful Decennial Census”

Good morning Chairman Turner, Mr. Clay, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Kathleen Cooper -- Commerce Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. My responsibilities include advising the Secretary of Commerce on economic policy and exercising managerial direction over the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Census Bureau.

First, let me take a moment to thank you Chairman Turner and this subcommittee for your past support and for the support we will request in the future. Your predecessor, Representative Adam Putnam, Chairman Tom Davis of the full committee, and Chairman Frank Wolf also have been key architects in the direction of the 2010 census.

Those in Congress who may not be aware of the cyclical nature of the census often see the period between censuses as an opportunity to shift scarce fiscal resources to other projects. While members view the decennial census as a vital mission, some may perceive it as several years down the road and, therefore, not critical to fully fund in interim years. The fact is planning, testing, and preparation needs to occur now and each year through 2010 to ensure a successful enumeration and compilation.

Members of this committee, former Chairman Putnam and Chairmen Davis and Wolf understand the funding cycle and have worked to ensure adequate funding for census preparations.

According to Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution, an enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States is the responsibility of the Congress. It is notable, perhaps for the Federalism subcommittee, that the framers did not put this responsibility in Article II under the powers of the executive branch. Nor did they reserve it to the states.

The Congress has delegated census-taking work to the Bureau. Essentially, the Census Bureau is your data collector and statistical contractor. And pleased to be so.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing and provide a description, at this important mid-decade milestone, as to how our work is going.

The 2010 Census represents a sea change in how we count our population.

It also reflects our dedication to improving census procedures as our population and technology evolve. The evolution of census taking and the revolutionary procedures for

the next census are designed -- and will be implemented -- with improved accuracy as the goal.

In 1790, U.S. Marshals traveled door-to-door on horseback to determine the number of residents in the original 13 states and territories. In 2010, hundreds of thousands of enumerators will follow maps drawn with global positioning satellite technology in what will likely be the largest peacetime mobilization of the decade.

As the Marshals knew and as enumerators know today, good, up-to-date maps are essential for an accurate census.

The term MAF/TIGER may not mean much to those outside the Bureau but it is very important the count. MAF stands for Master Address File and it is the address book enumerators will follow. TIGER stands for Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Reference system, which is the "road map".

In 1830, printed forms were used for the first time in census taking, replacing a marshal's notebook. In 2010, enumerators will enter data in a handheld computer. This small palm-sized device is a far cry from the enormous UNIVAC computer that tabulated data in 1950.

Over the years, more and different questions have been included in the census. In 1840, questions on agriculture, mining and fishing were added. This precursor to the every-five-year economic census also changed over the years. In 1940, the Bureau determined that only a sample of the population needed to complete the aptly named "long form" in order to understand the changing characteristics of our population. Importantly, the census will be taken in 2010 by a short form only.

Improvements are ongoing thanks to FY 2005 appropriations. Another 610 counties will be added to the enhanced MAF/TIGER File and important planning and testing continues, including a national mailout test in 2005.

And, of course, the American Community Survey is up and running which results in two important deliverables.

First, with the American Community Survey in place, every household will receive a short-form questionnaire in 2010. As you can imagine, the short form has a much higher response rate than the long form. All of our census-taking manpower and resources can be dedicated to obtaining an accurate count of every person on April 1, 2010.

Second, by having a continuous American Community Survey, Congress and the American people will have valuable and timely information on important characteristics about our population every year. When city planners in Dayton need to know where a new bus route is needed, they can refer to ACS data on commute times to work. Language needs in St. Louis schools can be considered based on new ACS data, not information from 2000.

Every August, the American Community Survey data will be released about the previous year--only eight months after the data collection period ends. What an improvement over the decennial model that produced data only once a decade, and two years after the data were collected.

This year we will see rich, long-form quality data for communities 250,000 or larger. Next year, cities and towns with populations of at least 65,000 will have data on their characteristics. And so on until the summer of 2010, when we will see ACS data for every community in the United States right down to the tract and block-group level.

The long form served us well from 1940 through the 2000 census, but its time has passed. Long-form data provided a wonderful, once-a-decade snapshot. The ACS is a moving video image, continually updated to provide much needed data about our nation in today's fast-moving world.

Ultimately, the result will be increased accuracy for the 2010 enumeration. By removing the long form from the count, we also remove the labor-intensive follow up demanded by the long form. In April of 2010, you will see the maximum capacity of census resources focused on finding and counting people. I hope -- and believe -- that accuracy will be improved and the undercount narrowed.

The American Community Survey questionnaire is very similar in content to the long form used in Census 2000. All the questions are responsive to a law, statute, or court order.

The Census Bureau has worked many years with Congress and other Federal agencies to ensure that the answers to those questions will provide the data to meet the statutory requirements established by Congress. Unfortunately, the Census Bureau has been ridiculed in the past for asking questions some believe to be intrusive, for instance: "does this house, apartment, or mobile home have complete plumbing facilities?"

The Departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development use these answers to determine public health policy and the condition of housing in remote areas and in low-income neighborhoods. And let's not forget how local water and sewage authorities need this information to increase their capacities to ensure water pressure to the new 1,000-unit housing development and shopping center that was just built on what had been farmland in Ohio or a ranch in South Texas.

We ask every question for a reason. Every answer is needed.

ACS is a most vital innovation to the 2010 census. But to be successful, people must respond. It only takes about 20 minutes. A quarter of a million surveys are going out each month nationwide -- that's three million per year. Surveys touch every county and Congressional district in the country and the results will too. Census staff has made an impressive effort to alert Congressional district offices to the benefits of the ACS data.

We hope your offices and those of your colleagues will encourage constituents to complete this mandatory collection form.

ACS will make the 2010 census better and will help community leaders make more informed decisions.

Let me stress for a moment the confidentiality aspect of census taking. The answers provided on the ACS are confidential. The privacy of every one of your constituents is protected. Census employees swear an oath to protect the data and the privacy of respondents. I have observed that they take that promise very seriously.

And, if they do not, penalties – including fines and federal prison time – are severe.

Census professionals know well that the quality of their products depends on respondent cooperation. And cooperation depends on trust. We are going to protect that trust.

The Administration supports the three pillars of the re-engineered 2010 census: the American Community Survey, the short-form only count, and better mapping thanks to MAF/TIGER.

We thank Congress for its support and we look forward to continuing our work with you to ensure a successful 2010 count.

I would be happy to take your questions at the appropriate time.